

Leader Decisions

26 April 2022

PETITION: BRING SURREY CHOICES BACK INTO SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

We the undersigned petition Surrey County Council to bring Surrey Choices back fully under local authority control and management. We oppose Surrey County Council's proposed cuts to the budget of Surrey Choices. We believe that service users and staff would benefit from the service being brought back into the council, as opposed to being a private company that the council 'owns'.

Justification:

Surrey Choices is a "Local Authority Trading Company", wholly owned by Surrey County Council, established by Surrey County Council in August 2014 when it was outsourced from local authority control..

Surrey Choices now has a contract with Surrey County Council to provide opportunities for adults, with learning and other disabilities, to access activities. The original business case for outsourcing Surrey Choices was that it would save Surrey County Council money and improve outcomes for service users. Since Surrey Choices was created, the budget has been repeatedly and substantially cut.

Surrey Choices is currently facing significant budget cuts, while trying to transform the way care is delivered in the county, at the same time. Budget cuts are having a significant impact on the service provision from Surrey Choices, for adults with disabilities in Surrey. Staff who work for Surrey Choices earn less and receive fewer benefits than colleagues in Surrey County Council, for work of equal value. The lowest paid staff in Surrey Choices receive just the minimum wage. No staff directly employed by the council receive this low rate.

We want the opportunity to put questions to Surrey County Council. Some examples of questions we want to ask are:

- How can Surrey Choices be expected to transform the way care is delivered, while dealing with significant budget cuts at the same time?
- Why are low wages, with no enhancements and longer working hours, appropriate for Surrey Choices staff, but not for staff who are employed directly by Surrey County Council?
- Why are Surrey County Council seeking to benefit from a chronically underfunded system, by paying the absolute bare minimum, rather than setting the standard for pay and conditions in adult social care in the private sector in Surrey?
- We feel staff, service users and carers and families are being let down by the current situation.

We feel everyone would be better off – service users and staff - if Surrey Choices was brought back into Surrey County Council ownership, control, and management.

Submitted by: Barney Wakefield, Unison

Signatures: 110

Response:***Transforming services***

Surrey Choices has been able to progress the transformation of the way care and support is delivered at the same time as delivering efficiencies, while also having to cope with and significantly adjust its operations in response to the Pandemic. We expect this transformation to continue as Surrey Choices, in partnership with SCC, continues to support Surrey residents to have much greater choice in how they want to be supported. This is evident in the changes that Surrey Choices has been able to work through in 2021/22. They have evolved their service delivery model to be operating out of 7 fewer locations meaning that they now work out of 17 locations instead of 24. Through the development of Person-Centred Plans around 90 people are now being supported through their Community Choices programme which enables people to choose to do different things in the community and access a wider range of services.

Surrey Choices has also worked closely with the Adult Social Care learning disabilities team to review almost 230 people living in residential care and supported living. These reviews and Person-Centred Plans have enabled:

- 52 people to choose to do other things and reduce the number of times they attend a 'day centre',
- 16 people to choose not to attend anymore
- 8 individuals to get more support through increasing their use of Surrey Choices services

By changing the model of service delivery Surrey Choices has delivered efficiencies while improving the offer to Surrey residents so that it is better aligned with their preferences and needs.

Pay rates and terms and conditions

Surrey Choices management team in conjunction with their board set the terms and conditions for Surrey Choices staff. They have confirmed that for 2022/23 there will be a higher than inflation uplift for those on the lowest salaries in the organisation and that they will become a Real Living Wage employer in 2022/23.

Funding and setting standards/supporting the social care workforce

SCC has ensured that the right level of funding has been made available to Surrey Choices and that funding is set at a level that reflects their plans and progress with rolling out a more flexible, personalised, and efficient service operating model. Funding decisions are also made in a broader context of overall council resources and the ASC budget. As noted above Surrey Choices have confirmed that the lowest paid staff will receive higher than inflations pay awards for 2022/23 and that they will become a Real Living Wage employer in 2022/23. I therefore do not agree that the Council is 'chronically underfunding' these services or that by virtue of the funding that SCC makes available to Surrey Choices this has meant the terms and conditions Surrey Choices sets for its staff is "the absolute bare minimum".

More broadly the Council has also made a commitment to workforce development and to work closely with social care providers and Surrey Care Association on this. This includes making a £3million provision in the ASC budget for workforce development and Surrey Choices among other providers will benefit from this in 2022/23. In addition, through working with our health partners we have also been able to secure match funding from Surrey

Heartlands to support this work around recruitment, retention, and development of the social care workforce.

Have users, families and staff been let down?

I note Unison's view is that staff, families, and users are being let down by Surrey Choices, however I do not agree with it. Unison has presented no evidence to support this claim whereas it is evident from changes being delivered by Surrey Choices that users are benefiting from greater choice and control in their lives and the more flexible way in which they are being supported by Surrey Choices. Surrey Choices would be willing to share with Unison examples of the positive changes and individual journeys and what it means for those involved should Unison wish to hear about this.

Tim Oliver
Leader of the Council
26 April 2022

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